

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. The FCC has not been protecting the American people's interest in having access to a free, fair, and balanced exchange of news and public affairs information. When large companies like Sinclair control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Today I talked with Bill Fanshaw, the general manager of WBFF/WNUV in Baltimore, Maryland and a member of his news staff. Both of them claimed "it is not our decision" and we "have no responsibility" in the decision to air the program. Mr. Fanshaw said he had never seen "Stolen Honor" or had any idea that it was a pro-Bush program. Yet he claimed that the Kerry camp had been offered an opportunity to participate in the program--as if that would take care of the issue of fairness. When asked if he intended to allow the airing of a pro-Kerry program like "Going Upriver," he said it was not under consideration. It is very distressful to me as a former broadcast journalist to hear media managers trying to duck their responsibility for the programming they offer to their viewers--and I reminded him that he has a responsibility to fairness. Either do not air such a polemic program-or at least offer the opposition "equal time."

I reminded Mr. Fanshaw--and I remind the commissioners of the FCC--that as Americans who are involved in the very important field of media, you each have a responsibility to fellow citizens to make our airwaves serve the purpose of our democracy which is to make certain each citizen is well informed enough to make intelligent thoughtful decisions about our society and our government representatives.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.